

Say It Right the First Time

Using Plain Language to Improve Communication

2010



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About This Guide

Communicating clearly is important regardless of your audience. Ensuring that an audience understands your message requires the ability and discipline to write as clearly and simply as possible.

According to the most recent literacy data, 53% of working-age adults in Los Angeles have low literacy levels (Literacy@Work, 2004). As Department of Public Health employees, we face the challenge of ensuring that all residents have the ability to receive and understand the information they need to make informed decisions about their health. Whether your goal is to increase immunization rates, reduce the prevalence of STDs, or educate parents about the dangers of lead poisoning, communicating clearly using “plain language” is essential.

Plain language (also called plain English) is messaging that your audience understands the first time it reads or hears it. Plain language is supported by the federal government, encouraged by the LA County Board of Supervisors, and promoted by the Department of Public Health’s leadership. Its principles can be used in almost every area of communication to improve and streamline print materials, oral presentations, and other modes of communication. Additionally, plain language can increase your agency’s productivity while also reducing costs.

This guide was developed by the Department of Public Health’s *Health Education Administration* to help you “Say It Right the First Time” when communicating health messages with your partners and the public. However, the guidelines and activities within this manual can be used by individuals in other fields to improve materials, presentations, and other forms of communication.

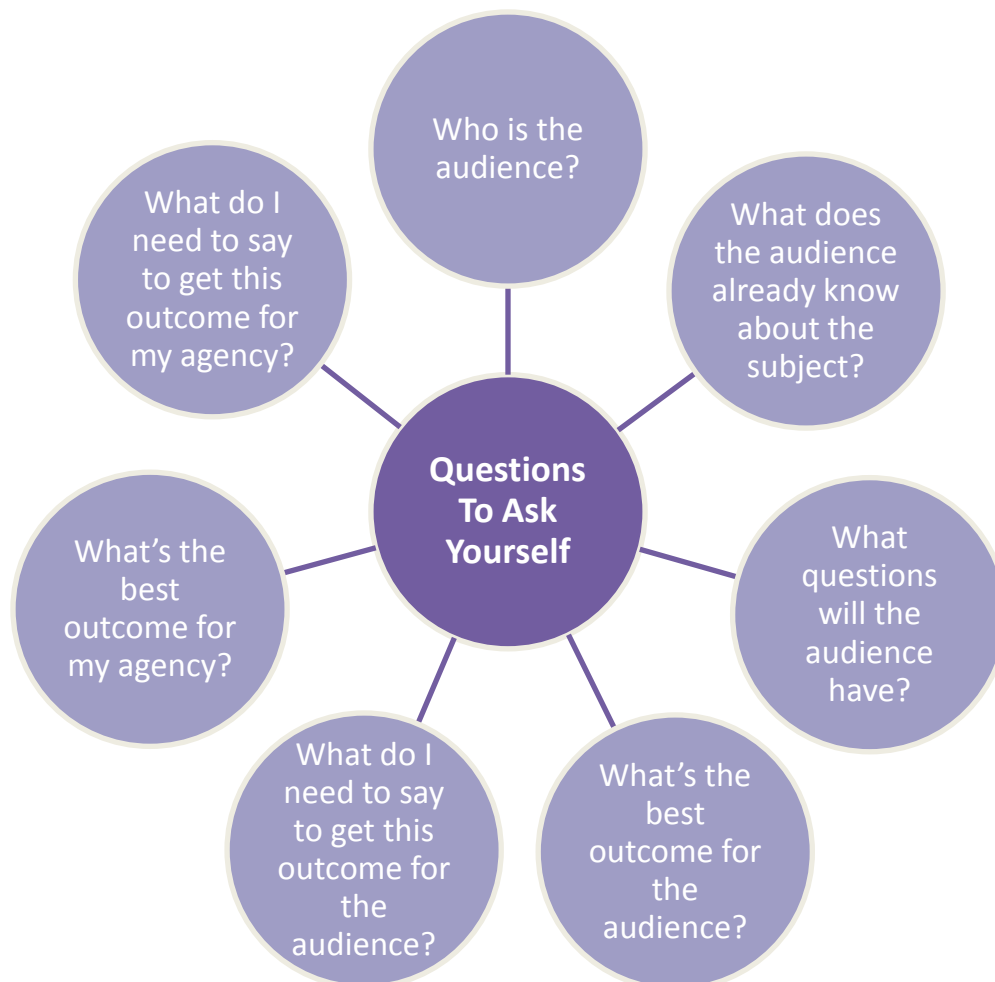
Audience: Getting to Know Your Reader

Introduction

It's important to get to know your audience to identify effective ways to communicate with audience members. When you understand characteristics of your audience – for example, its prior knowledge, motivation, preferred language and literacy level, occupation and disease status – it's easier to target messages.

Key Questions

Before you begin writing, ask yourself the following questions:



One way to answer these questions is to hold a focus group with members of your target audience. Once you answer these questions, you can begin developing your message. Refer to page 11 for more information on focus groups. Additional focus group resources can be found on page 30.

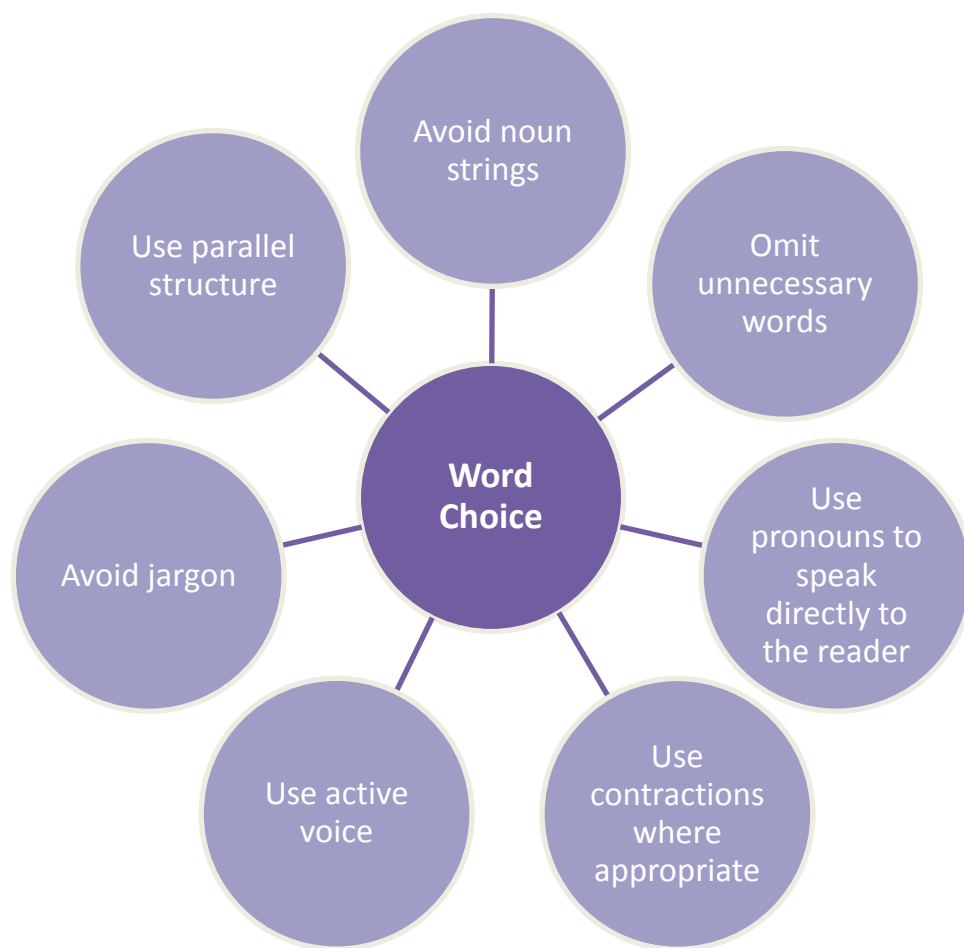
Content: Writing Your Document

Introduction

Once you know who your audience is, you can create messages that are more understandable and appropriate for its members. The following sections provide suggestions for how to evaluate and increase the clarity of the words, sentences, and paragraphs that make up your messages.

Word Choice

Appropriate word choice can increase the clarity of your document by helping your audience understand what is expected of it and of you. Important tips to remember include:



The guidelines on the following page explain each component of this diagram.

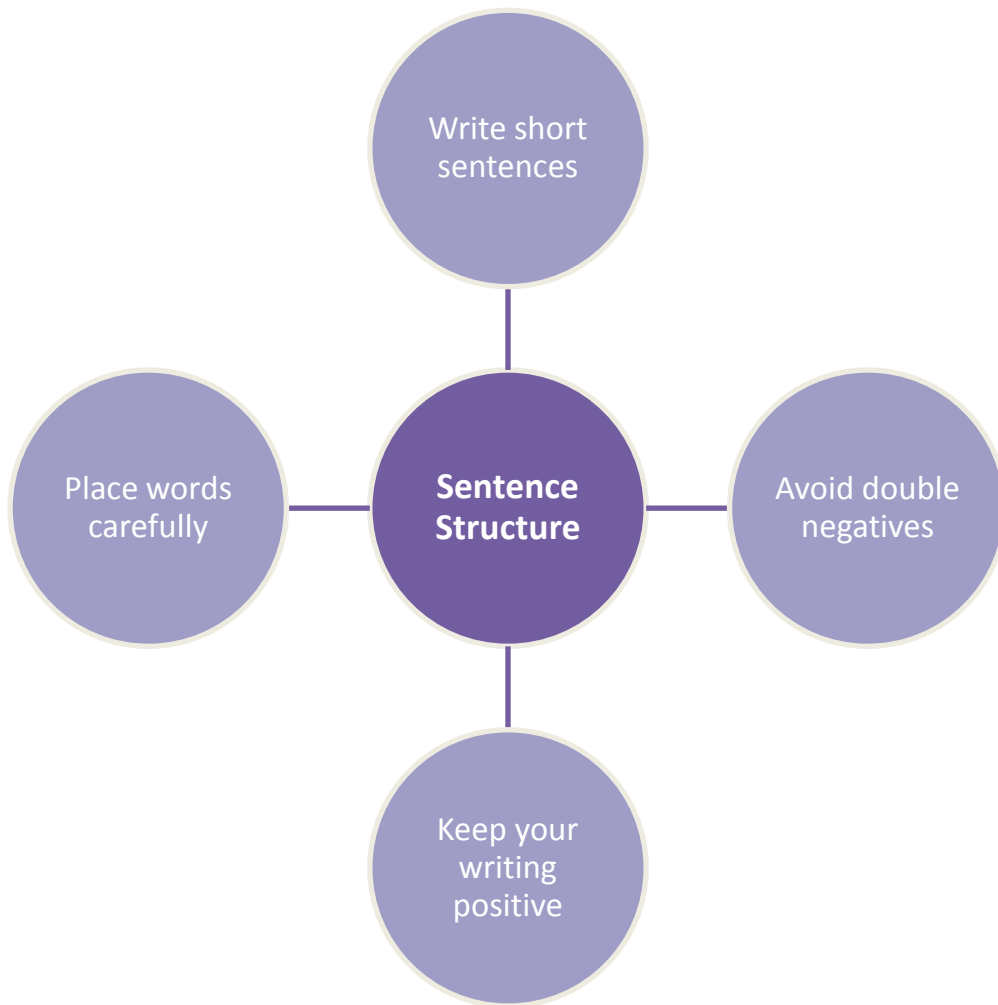
Guidelines

Refer to the glossary on page 16 for definitions of unfamiliar words and phrases.

- *Avoid Noun Strings*
 - **Don't:** Children's Hospital has a hospital employee relations improvement program.
 - **Do:** Children's Hospital has a program to improve employee relations.
- *Omit Unnecessary Words*
 - **Don't:** See your doctor for examination and testing if you experience any of these symptoms.
 - **Do:** See your doctor for testing if you experience any of these symptoms.
- *Use Pronouns to Speak Directly to the Reader*
 - **Don't:** If the patient experiences chest pain, sweating, and shortness of breath, they should immediately call 9-1-1.
 - **Do:** If you experience chest pain, sweating, and shortness of breath, immediately call 9-1-1.
- *Use Contractions Where Appropriate*
 - **Don't:** If you do not pay your co-pay, the doctor will not see you.
 - **Do:** If you don't pay your co-pay, the doctor won't see you.
- *Use Active Voice*
 - **Don't:** The pamphlet was created by the health educator.
 - **Do:** The health educator created the pamphlet.
- *Avoid Jargon*
 - **Don't:** The patient is receiving positive-pressure ventilatory support.
 - **Do:** The patient is on a respirator.
- *Use Parallel Structure (Consistent Verb Tense)*
 - **Don't:** Public health accomplishments include developing vaccinations, ensuring safer workplaces, and the control of infectious diseases.
 - **Do:** Public health accomplishments include developing vaccinations, ensuring safer workplaces, and controlling infectious diseases.

Sentence Structure

Using simple and effective words will create simple and effective sentences. Important tips to remember include:



The guidelines on the following page explain each component of this diagram.

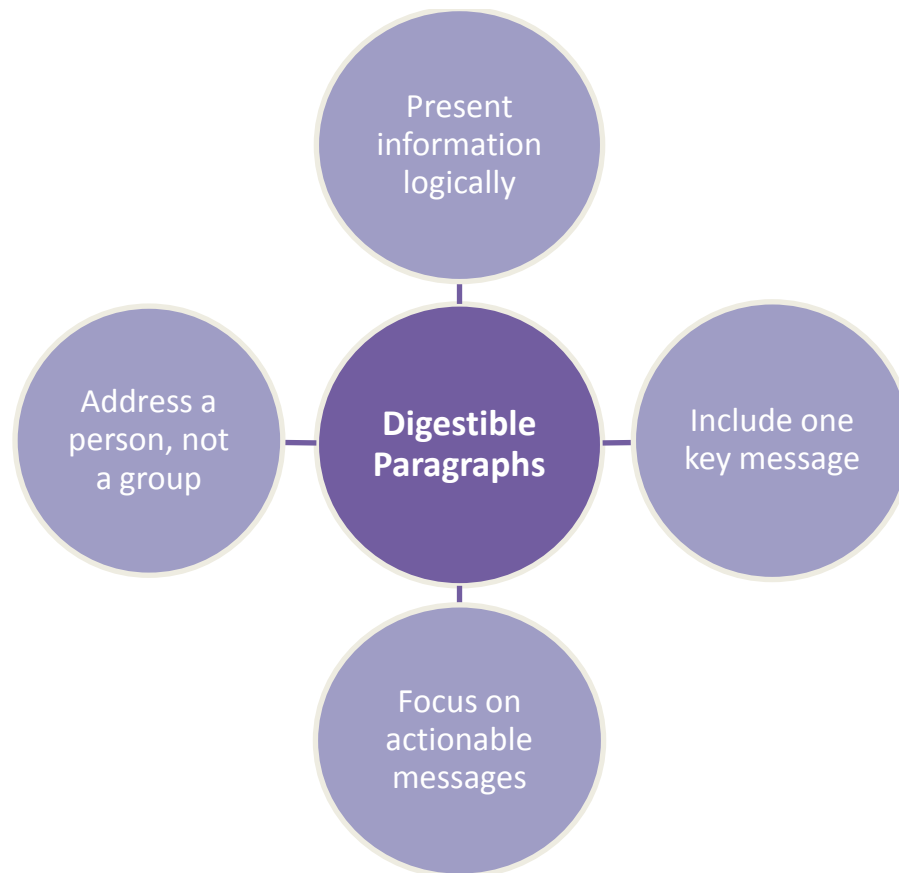
Guidelines

Refer to the glossary on page 16 for definitions of unfamiliar words and phrases.

- *Write Short Sentences (less than 15-20 words)*
 - **Don't:** Often times, there are no symptoms of breast cancer, but signs of breast cancer can include a breast lump or an abnormal mammogram.
 - **Do:** Often, there are no symptoms of breast cancer. However, warning signs can include a breast lump or an abnormal mammogram.
- *Avoid Double Negatives*
 - **Don't:** It was so hot, I couldn't hardly breathe.
 - **Do:** It was so hot, I could hardly breathe.
- *Keep Your Writing Positive*
 - **Don't:** Persons other than the patient may not view the test results.
 - **Do:** Only the patient may view the test results.
- *Place Words Carefully (Subject + Verb + Object)*
 - **Don't:** Patients may not, without first obtaining a referral, book an appointment with a specialist.
 - **Do:** Patients may book an appointment with a specialist after obtaining a referral.

Digestible Paragraphs

Writing paragraphs that are easy to read and understand is especially important for young readers, adults with low literacy skills, and individuals who are unfamiliar with the subject. Digestible paragraphs reduce ambiguity and provide clear instructions and expectations for your audience. Important tips to remember include:



Guidelines

- *Present Information Logically*
 - Present the most important information first, or organize chronologically.
- *Include One Key Message*
 - Limit a paragraph to one key message and a document to 3-4 messages.
- *Focus on Actionable Messages*
 - Provide your reader with information on how he/she can take action.
- *Address a Person, Not a Group*
 - Use singular nouns to indicate that the message applies to your reader.

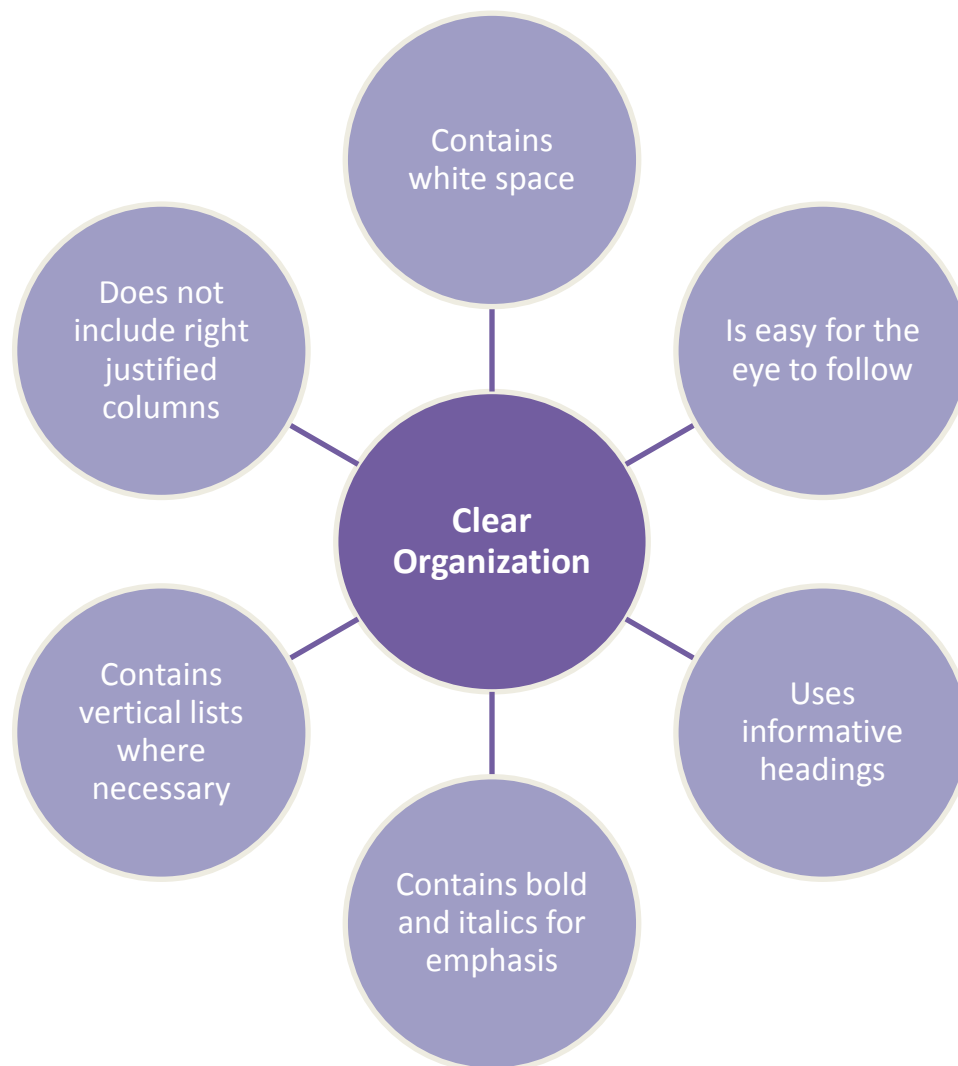
Organization: Laying Out Your Information

Introduction

The organization of your document affects your audience's desire to continue reading and ability to find the information it needs. Clear organization helps ensure that your message reaches your intended audience.

Clear Organization

The following are important guidelines to consider when organizing your document.



Refer to page 19 for an example fact sheet that incorporates these principles. You can rate your own document's organization by using the rubric on page 22.

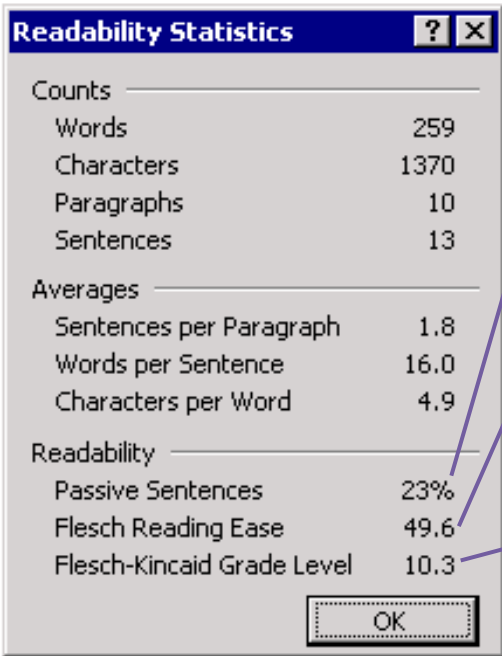
Readability: Evaluating Your Document

Microsoft Word includes a function that provides you with readability statistics about your document. When the readability statistics feature is enabled, Word will analyze your document using the Flesch-Kincaid model to identify the grade level (0-12) and the reading ease (0-100%). You can also assess your document's readability manually by using SMOG or Fry tests. Refer to page 30 for more information about these resources.

To enable the readability statistics feature, follow these simple steps:

Microsoft Word 2007	Older versions of Microsoft Word
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Open Word.2. Click the Microsoft Office Button, and click Word Options.3. Click Proofing.4. Select the Show Readability Statistics check box, and click OK.5. Click Spelling and Grammar button.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Open Word.2. Click Options, and choose the Spelling and Grammar tab.3. Select the Check Grammar with Spelling check box.4. Select the Show Readability Statistics check box, and click OK.5. Click Spelling and Grammar button.

The following is a screen shot of the results you'll see when using Microsoft Word readability statistics:



Microsoft Word readability statistics

The *Passive Sentences* readability score provides the percentage of passive sentences found in a text. **Aim for a low passive sentences ratio for the best readability.**

The *Flesch Reading Ease* readability score rates text based on the average number of syllables per word and words per sentence. The higher the Flesch Reading Ease score, the easier it is to understand the document. **Aim for a Flesch Reading Ease score of 60 or above.**

The *Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level* readability score analyzes and rates text on a U.S. grade school level based on the average number of syllables per word and words per sentence. **Aim for a Flesch-Kincaid score between 6.0 and 7.0.**

Message Effectiveness: Testing Your Document

Introduction

Testing your document should be an important part of your plain language writing process, not something you do afterwards to see if your document was a success. This process saves time by identifying potential problems and making appropriate revisions before the document reaches your target audience.

Testing Strategies

You can use different testing strategies to produce qualitative or quantitative data.

- **Protocol testing** and **focus groups** produce qualitative data: What do people think about the document?
- **Control groups** produce quantitative data: Do the numbers show that your document produces the intended result?

• *When to Use:* After completing a final draft of your document.
• *How to Use:* One-on-one interviews with the participant.
• *What You'll Get:* Specific information about how people read your document and what they think your document means.

Protocol Testing



• *When to Use:* Before drafting your document.
• *How to Use:* Small group (usually 8-12 people) discussions.
• *What You'll Get:* Information about how readers feel about the topic; messaging strategies they think will work for their population.

Focus Groups



• *When to Use:* After protocol testing and revising a document or during a pilot.
• *How to Use:* Small group of people review old and new versions of your document; provide written feedback.
• *What You'll Get:* A comparison between the old document and the new document.

Control Groups



Like any good tools, protocol tests, focus groups, and control groups are most successful when used for their intended purpose. Focus groups and control groups are optional depending on what type of document you are developing. Refer to page 30 for more focus group resources, such as a facilitation guide.

Oral Communication: Presenting Your Message

Introduction

Oral communication relies on the same principles as written communication to create effective messages: these include understanding your target audience, using plain language, limiting the number of ideas presented, and focusing on actionable messages. Refer to the previous sections for more details and directions on each of these principles.

Oral Communication Skills

Mastering several oral communication skills will ensure that your message is delivered in a way that resonates with your audience.

Key Points to Remember

- *Get to know your audience.*
- *Limit your message to 3-4 key points on which your audience can act. Refer to the message map on page 20 for more information.*
- *Avoid technical and legal jargon.*
- *Organize messages to meet the needs of your audience.*
- *Test your message.*

Guidelines

- *Create a Roadmap for the Audience*
 - Provide your audience with a roadmap of the main points you plan to cover, deliver your presentation, and then provide a summary of what you covered.
- *Make Eye Contact and Use Non-Verbal Communication*
 - Creating and maintaining eye contact establishes a relationship with your audience. Keeping your arms uncrossed and limiting your use of a podium are also techniques for engaging your audience. Remember to carry your body in an open manner.
- *Match Your Tone and Style*
 - You can increase comprehension by adapting your tone and style to that of the audience. Refer to page 3 for ways to understand your audience.
- *Ask Questions*
 - Making your presentation a conversation instead of a monologue will keep your audience engaged. Call on audience members to participate by asking them to provide definitions, explanations, or examples.
- *Use the Teach-Back Method*
 - Ensure that your audience understands your message. Call on audience members to explain your message back to you.

Using PowerPoint to Strengthen Your Presentation

PowerPoint slides are often used to guide the flow of a presentation. These slides should incorporate the plain language principles presented earlier in this guide. Following the additional PowerPoint guidelines below will help create a visual representation of your message that can strengthen your oral communication. Refer to page 21 for a sample slide that follows these guidelines. You can rate your presentation by using the rubric on page 25.

Guidelines

- *Keep Your Slides Brief*
 - Each slide should include only one key point.
 - Present information in bullets that use less than eight words per line.
 - Keep each slide to 6-8 lines total.
- *Clearly Format Your Slides*
 - Avoid using all capital letters in the title or body of slides. Instead, capitalize the first letter of the first word for each bullet point.
 - Left align all text leaving the right side of each line ragged.
 - Use the same font style throughout the presentation, with a minimum of 24 point font.
 - Bold, underline, and italicize font sparingly to emphasize key points.
- *Avoid Reading to Your Audience*
 - PowerPoint slides should serve as an outline of what you're telling the audience, not a transcript.
 - Incorporate learning activities into your presentation. People learn best when they get to apply the information they are being taught.
- *Use Visual Aids*
 - Use photo-ready visuals to emphasize or explain text (i.e. not distorted, stretched, or pixilated).
 - Include a title or caption for visuals.
- *Be Aware of Time*
 - Keep in mind the attention span of your audience.
 - Aim to cover each slide in 1-1 ½ minutes.
 - Leave ample time for questions from your audience.

Plain Language Exercises

These exercises draw on the themes presented in this manual, and are designed to help you refine your plain language skills.

One theme is identified for each sentence below. Reword the sentences using plain language principles. Potential solutions are provided on the following page.

1. *Clarity*: The myriad symptoms of Celiac disease are frequently to blame for elusive diagnoses.
2. *Jargon*: To slow bleeding, initiate pressure application to the wounded area.
3. *Active vs. Passive Voice*: The latest screening methodology is utilized by this office to detect cases of tuberculosis.
4. *Pronouns*: The Department of Public Health believes that all Los Angeles residents should have access to safe drinking water.
5. *Unnecessary Words*: In the event that an earthquake occurs while you're driving, park in a safe location and set the parking brake.
6. *Redundancy*: During the month of December, 100 cases of seasonal flu were diagnosed.

Choose the theme that best identifies the plain language problem in each of the sentences below. Each answer is used only once.

- | | |
|---|----------------------|
| 1. ____ Due to the fact that seasonal flu is highly contagious, keep your child home from school if he/she has common symptoms. | A. Pronouns |
| 2. ____ Misinformation about vaccination side effects was dispelled by community health educators. | B. Jargon |
| 3. ____ Individuals with a past history of asthma or other respiratory conditions should receive the vaccination. | C. Passive Voice |
| 4. ____ The Department of Public Health encourages individuals to make exercise a part of their weekly routine. | D. Unnecessary Words |
| 5. ____ High cholesterol levels can lead to atherosclerosis. | E. Redundancy |

Answer Guide

The following sentences are examples of how to correctly rewrite the sentences provided using plain language principles.

1. Celiac disease is hard to diagnose because it has many symptoms.
2. To slow bleeding, apply pressure to the wounded area.
3. We utilize the latest screening methods to detect cases of tuberculosis.
4. We believe that you should have access to safe drinking water.
5. If an earthquake occurs while you're driving, park in a safe location and set the parking brake.
6. In December, 100 cases of seasonal flu were diagnosed.

The following answers represent the plain language problem in the sentences provided.

1. D
2. C
3. E
4. A
5. B

Glossary

Active Voice: The voice used to indicate that the grammatical subject of the verb is performing the action. "The boy threw the ball" uses active voice.

Contraction: A shortened form of a word or group of words, with the omitted letters often replaced by an apostrophe.

Control Group: A group of subjects that closely resemble the treatment group in many demographic variables but do not receive the factor under study, thereby serving as a comparison when treatment results are evaluated.

Double Negative: A sentence containing two negative words.

Focus Group: A small group selected from a wider population and sampled, as by open discussion, for its members' opinions about or responses to a particular subject or area.

Jargon: The language, especially the vocabulary, specific to a particular trade, profession, or group.

Justified Text: A paragraph or block of text in which all words in all lines are spaced such that the first word aligns with the left margin and last word with the right margin.

Left Justified: A paragraph or block of text in which the first word in all lines is aligned with the left margin, and the last word in all lines is ragged against the right margin.

Noun Strings: Groups of nouns sandwiched together, such as "draft laboratory animal rights protection regulations."

Parallel Structure: A term used to describe similar ideas in similar ways. When a writer presents a series of ideas, they should be stated the same way. This is most often seen in verb tense. It is especially important for lists, headings, and subheadings.

Passive Voice: One of the two "voices" of verbs. A verb is in the passive voice when the subject of the sentence is acted on by the verb. "The ball was thrown by the boy" uses passive voice.

Plain Language: Clear, straightforward expression, using only as many words as are necessary.

Pronoun: Words that are used as replacements or substitutes for nouns and noun phrases, such as *I*, *you*, and *he*.

Qualitative Data: Data collected as descriptive information through open-ended questions, feedback surveys, or summary reports.

Quantitative Data: Data that is measured or identified on a numerical scale.

Right Justified: Paragraph or block of text in which the last word in all lines is aligned with the right margin, and the first word in all lines is ragged against the left margin.

Appendices

Say It Right the First Time

Using Plain Language to Improve Communication

Department of Public Health employees face the challenge of ensuring that all LA County residents receive and understand relevant health messages. This will allow individuals to make informed decisions about their health. Incorporating plain language principles into our communication is one of the ways we can address this challenge.

Get to know your audience.

You must understand your audiences' prior knowledge, interest, motivation, and literacy level to create an effective message. Ask yourself: Who is the audience? What questions will they have? What do they already know? What do they need to know?

Focus your message.

Avoid presenting too much information. Limit your message to 3-4 key points on which your audience can act.

Write short sentences.

Sentences should not exceed 15-20 words and should contain only one idea.

Avoid jargon.

Replace technical and legal jargon with words and phrases your audience understands.
Example: Replace hypertension with high blood pressure.

Use active voice.

Active voice presents information in a clear and direct manner for your audience. *Do:* The health educator created the pamphlet. *Don't:* The pamphlet was created by the health educator.

Organize messages to meet your readers' needs.

Present the most important information first or use chronological order. Use informative headings to reveal your document's organization. Make your document more visually appealing by using white space effectively. *Example:* Use bullets to break up a wall of text.

Check your readability level.

Microsoft Word includes a function that allows you to find readability statistics about your document. This function identifies passive voice, long sentences, and readability level. Aim for a 6th-7th grade reading level.

Test your message.

Message testing can include qualitative and/or quantitative measures. Protocol testing and focus groups produce qualitative data: What do people think about it? Control groups produce quantitative data: What do the numbers show?

For more information, visit our Health Education Materials webpage at <http://tinyurl.com/2bghfee>, or Health Education Administration's home page at <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/hea/>.

Sample 1: Print Material

Understanding Cholesterol

1. What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a fat-like substance that is found in your bloodstream and in your cells. It's important because it keeps your cells healthy. But, too much cholesterol can be bad for your health. Combined with other substances, it can form plaque (a thick, hard deposit) that clogs the arteries of the heart. Clogged arteries can lead to heart attacks or strokes.

2. How do you get cholesterol?

Having high cholesterol, diabetes, a family history and being overweight increase your chances of getting high cholesterol. Smoking, being physically inactive, and having a high fat diet are also risk factors.

3. What are the symptoms of cholesterol?

High cholesterol has no symptoms. The only way to tell if you have it is by getting a blood test. Ask your doctor for a cholesterol test and get re-tested every five years. Your doctor may suggest getting tested more often if you have a family history or other risk factors.

4. How can cholesterol be prevented?

In many people, high cholesterol can be treated with lifestyle changes, such as exercising, eating healthy, and losing weight. Eat a healthy diet which includes more fruits and vegetables, fish, reduced fat dairy products and whole grains like oatmeal, brown rice and barley. Limit saturated fat, like fatty meats, butter and whole milk. Limit cholesterol intake to less than 300 mg/day. Control your weight. Increase physical activity to at least 30 minutes per day. Avoid smoking. Don't have more than one alcoholic drink per day. Schedule regular cholesterol screenings as recommended by your doctor, and learn stress management techniques, such as yoga.

5. What are the desired cholesterol levels?

Total Cholesterol: Less than 200mg

HDL (High density lipoprotein), also known as "good" cholesterol:
Greater than 60mg

LDL (Low density lipoprotein), also known as "bad" cholesterol:
Less than 100mg

Triglycerides: Less than 150 mg

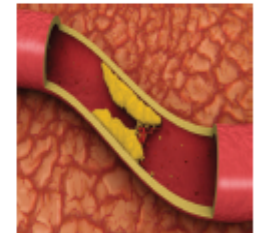


CHOLESTEROL

Understanding High Cholesterol

What is high cholesterol?

High cholesterol is a main cause of heart disease. Cholesterol is a fat-like substance and is found in your bloodstream and in your cells. It's important because it keeps your cells healthy. But, too much cholesterol can be bad for your health. Combined with other substances, it can form plaque (a thick, hard deposit). This can clog the arteries of the heart and lead to heart attack or stroke.



What are the signs and symptoms of high cholesterol?

High cholesterol has no symptoms. The only way to tell if you have it is by getting a blood test. Ask your doctor for a cholesterol test and get re-tested every five years. Your doctor may suggest getting tested more often if you have a family history or other risk factors.

How do you manage high cholesterol?

In many patients, high cholesterol can be treated with lifestyle changes, such as diet, exercise and weight loss.

To prevent getting high cholesterol, follow these guidelines:

- Eat a healthy diet that includes lots of fruits, vegetables, fish, whole grains, and reduced fat dairy products.
- Limit saturated fats, like fatty meats, butter and whole milk.
- Limit cholesterol intake to less than 300 mg/day.
- Control your weight.
- Exercise at least 30 minutes each day.
- Do not smoke (call 1-800-NO-BUTTS to quit).
- Do not have more than one alcoholic drink per day.



Risk Factors

The following may increase your chances of getting high cholesterol:

- Family history
- Smoking
- Being physically inactive
- Being overweight
- High fat diet
- Age
- Pre-existing conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure

Healthy Cholesterol Levels

Total Cholesterol: Less than 200mg

HDL (High density lipoprotein), also known as "good" cholesterol:
Greater than 60mg

LDL (Low density lipoprotein), also known as "bad" cholesterol:
Less than 100mg

Triglycerides:
Less than 150mg

5/27/10

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health
www.publichealth.lacounty.gov



BEFORE: Not enough white space, font is too small (10 pt.), bullets and graphics are not used

AFTER: Sufficient white space, uses serifs, readable font size (12 pt.), uses bullets & graphics

Sample 2: Message Map and Template

Stakeholder: General Public Question or Concern: How contagious is smallpox?		
Key Message 1	Key Message 2	Key Message 3
Smallpox spreads slowly compared to measles and flu.	This allows time to trace those who have come in contact.	Vaccination shortly after contact will help prevent disease.
Supporting Fact 1-1	Supporting Fact 2-1	Supporting Fact 3-1
People are only infectious when a rash appears.	The incubation period for the disease is 10-14 days.	People who have never been vaccinated should be vaccinated first.
Supporting Fact 1-2	Supporting Fact 2-2	Supporting Fact 3-2
Smallpox requires hours of face-to-face contact.	Resources are available for tracing contacts.	Adults who were vaccinated as children may still have immunity.
Supporting Fact 1-3	Supporting Fact 2-3	Supporting Fact 3-3
There are no carriers without symptoms.	Vaccinating those who have been exposed has proved successful.	Adequate vaccine is on hand.

Source: Covello, V.T. (2002). *Message Mapping, Risk and Crisis Communication*. Center for Risk Communication. Retrieved July 7, 2010, from <http://rcfp.pbworks.com/f/MessageMapping.pdf>.

Stakeholder: Question or Concern:		
Key Message 1	Key Message 2	Key Message 3
Supporting Fact 1-1	Supporting Fact 2-1	Supporting Fact 3-1
Supporting Fact 1-2	Supporting Fact 2-2	Supporting Fact 3-2
Supporting Fact 1-3	Supporting Fact 2-3	Supporting Fact 3-3

Sample 3: PowerPoint Slide

RESEARCH

- We conduct and participate in research to find new strategies to deal with public health problems among diverse populations and the communities in which they live.
- examples of this research include: finding a cure for HIV, preventing violence and injury, and reducing the incidence of cancer.
- Another focal area includes investigating differences in the incidence, prevalence, mortality, and burden of diseases and other adverse health conditions that exist among specific population groups in the United States.



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
Public Health

BEFORE: Title is in all caps, sentences are very long, too many lines on the slide, font is too small, justified text, no photos

Research

- Finding a cure for HIV
- Preventing violence and injury
- Reducing incidence of cancer and cardiovascular diseases
- Implementing prevention programs at schools and worksites
- Investigating differences in disease rates among population groups



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
Public Health

1

AFTER: Title is not all caps, uses bullets instead of sentences, font size is readable, photos are used

Print Materials Rubric

The print materials rubric is designed to ensure that principals of plain language have been applied to your print materials. The rubric is divided into two sections: Content and Organization.

Directions:

1. Read each question carefully. Designate a category, “*Meets Standards*” or “*Doesn’t Meet Standards*”, by entering a number “1” in the appropriate field.
2. Calculate the total in Column 1.
3. Divide the total by the number of standards included in the section.
4. Multiply by 100 to convert this number into a percentage.

If your table score is 80% or higher, your document incorporates the principles of plain language. If your score is below 80%, we recommend revising your document by using the principles included in this manual. *The Simply Put* manual can also be used for guidance, and can be accessed at www.cdc.gov/od/oc/simpput.pdf.

Content			
Standards	Meets Standards (Column 1)	Doesn't Meet Standards/ Doesn't Apply	Suggested Changes
1. Uses contractions when necessary			
2. Avoids irrelevant information (i.e. the date of disease discovery)			
3. Uses active voice			
4. Uses pronouns to speak directly to the reader			
5. Uses short sentences (15-20 words)			
6. Uses conversational and easy-to-read style			
7. Limits jargon and technical language			
8. Avoids noun strings (<i>group of nouns sandwiched together</i>)			
9. Avoids double negatives (<i>two negatives words in a sentence</i>)			
10. Presents information in an order that is logical to the audience			
11. Limits messages to one per paragraph or section, and are actionable			
12. Omits unnecessary or extra words			
13. Is culturally appropriate to its target audience			
Column 1 Total			
Column 1 ÷ 13			
TABLE SCORE (%)			

Organization			
Standards	Meets Standards (Column 1)	Doesn't Meet Standards/ Doesn't Apply	Suggested Changes
1. Uses easy-to-read font (minimum 12 point)			
2. Puts information in chunks, using headings and subheadings			
3. Presents most important ideas first			
4. Uses 2-3 font styles or less per page			
5. Uses bold, underlining, and italics sparingly to highlight information			
6. Includes lists with bullets			
7. Has a lot of white space (1inch white space around margins and between columns)			
8. Does not include right justified columns			
9. Places visuals near related text			
10. Uses photo-ready visuals (i.e. not distorted, stretched, or pixilated)			
11. Uses the same types of photos throughout the document (i.e. <i>only</i> photos or <i>only</i> illustrations)			
Column 1 Total			
Column 1 Total ÷ 11			
TABLE SCORE (%)			

PowerPoint Presentation Rubric

The PowerPoint Presentation Rubric is designed to ensure that the principles of plain language have been applied to your community-level presentations. The rubric is divided into three sections: Audience, Organization and Writing Principles.

Directions:

1. Read each question carefully. Designate a category, *“Meets Standards”* or *“Doesn’t Meet Standards”*, by entering a number “1” in the appropriate field.
2. Calculate the total in Column 1.
3. Divide the total by the number of standards included in the section.
4. Multiply by 100 to convert this number into a percentage.

If your table score is 80% or higher, your document incorporates the principles of plain language. If your score is below 80%, we recommend revising your document by using the principles included in this manual.

Audience			
Standard	Meets Standards (Column 1)	Doesn't Meet Standards	Suggested Changes
1. Identifies action steps or desired behaviors for the audience			
2. Organizes information chronologically <i>or</i> in order of use/importance			
3. Uses conversational vs. formal tone			
4. Explains what should be done rather than what shouldn't be done			
5. Limits as much jargon and technical language as possible			
6. Explains technical or scientific language clearly			
7. Uses language that is culturally appropriate for target audience			
8. Uses same terms consistently for specific thoughts or objects			
9. Places the most important information at the beginning of the presentation and repeats it at the end			
10. Includes at least one phone number or website people can refer to for more information			
Column 1 Total			
Column 1 Total ÷ 10			
TABLE SCORE (%)			

Organization			
Standard	Meets Standards (Column 1)	Doesn't Meet Standards	Suggested Changes
1. Follows the LAC-DPH PowerPoint presentation template & guidelines			
2. Includes a "presentation agenda/overview"			
3. Matches "presentation agenda" items to slide headings			
4. Uses less than 8 <u>words</u> per line			
5. Uses no more than 6-8 <u>lines</u> per slide			
6. Uses one key point per slide			
7. Uses capital letters after every bullet			
8. Aligns all type on the left, with right margin ragged			
9. Uses the same font throughout the presentation			
10. Uses 24 point font as the minimum			
11. Uses 44 point font for Slide <u>Headings</u>			
12. Uses 32 point font for Slide <u>Subheadings</u>			
13. Uses subheadings that are indented			
14. Uses slide headings that are short, unique, and descriptive			
15. Avoids using all capital letters			
16. Uses a landscape set-up			
17. Includes a footer on each slide that contains presentation title and slide number			
18. Uses bold and underline functions to emphasize text			
19. Includes a summary slide			
20. Uses parallel structure (consistent verb tense)			

Organization			
Standard	Meets Standards (Column 1)	Doesn't Meet Standards	Suggested Changes
21. Uses tables or graphs to simplify complex information			
22. Uses ample white space and margins between sections and around headings			
23. Uses light letters on dark background (or dark letters on light background)			
24. Limits the number of graphs and tables included in the presentation			
25. Uses visuals to emphasize or explain text			
26. Uses photo-ready visuals (i.e. not distorted, stretched, or pixilated)			
27. Avoids using sound effects			
28. Uses one transition effect for all slides			
Column 1 Total			
Column 1 Total ÷ 28			
TABLE SCORE (%)			

Writing Principles			
Standards	Meets Standards (Column 1)	Doesn't Meet Standards	Suggested Changes
1. Uses points that can stand alone			
2. Uses action words			
3. Uses short/common words			
4. Uses concrete nouns			
5. Uses simplest form of verbs			
6. Uses correct spelling and grammar			
7. Avoids using definitions unless absolutely necessary (opts for simpler words instead of extensive explanations)			
8. Eliminates overly repeated words			
9. Uses an active voice			
10. Uses present tense			
11. Avoids turning verbs into nouns			
12. Avoids noun strings			
13. Uses pronouns to speak directly to audience (i.e. 'you', 'we')			
Column 1 Total			
Column 1 Total ÷ 13			
TABLE SCORE (%)			

Plain Language Resource List

Title	Description	URL
Clear & Simple: Developing Effective Print Materials for Low-Literate Readers	A National Cancer Institute resource that provides guidelines for creating clear and simple print materials (primarily focuses on disease specific information).	http://www.nci.nih.gov/aboutnci/oc/clear-and-simple/allpages
Easy-to-Read Guidelines for Clear and Effective Communication	Nine specific health literacy guidelines created by the New York City government to help communicators write in plain language.	http://www.nyc.gov/html/oath/pdf/Easy-to-Read%20NYC.pdf
Family Health and Literacy	A guide to easy-to-read health education materials and websites for families.	http://www.pharmacist.com/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Family_Health_Literacy_Guide
Focus Group Tips	Tips for creating a focus group moderator guide.	http://www.focusgrouptips.com/moderator-guide.html
Fry Readability Graph	A graph that estimates the reading level of your document.	http://school.discoveryeducation.com/schrockguide/fry/fry.html
General Guidelines for Focus Groups	A CDC guide to conducting focus groups.	http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dn pa/socialmarketing/training/pdf/focusgroupguidelines.pdf
Health Literacy: Help Your Patients Understand	The AMA Foundation Web site, which focuses on using health literacy to help physicians improve communication with their patients.	http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/8115.html
Making Health Communication Programs Work (the “Pink Book”)	The Pink Book describes a practical approach for planning and implementing health communication efforts.	http://www.cancer.gov/pinkbook
Message Mapping, Risk and Crisis Communication	A guide to creating a message map, which is a tool for organizing responses to anticipated questions or concerns.	http://rcfp.pbworks.com/f/Mess ageMapping.pdf
Pacific Public Health Training Center	A resource for the public health workforce that aims to support and enhance individual and community health needs.	http://www.pphtc.org/
PlainLanguage.gov	Designed to improve communication from the Federal Government to the public, this Web site contains tools and examples of plain language.	http://www.plainlanguage.gov
Plain Language Thesaurus	A thesaurus that offers plain language equivalents to medical terms, phrases, and references used in health communication.	http://depts.washington.edu/res pcare/public/info/Plain_Languag eThesaurus for Health Commun ications.pdf
Quality and Productivity Commission	An LA County plain language initiative that aims to improve customer service and reduce costs.	http://qpc.co.la.ca.us/pl.asp
Simply Put	A CDC communication guide that includes tips for creating easy to read print materials.	http://tinyurl.com/2gy3zcw
SMOG Readability Calculator	A calculator that estimates the reading level of your text.	http://www.harrymclaughlin.com/SMOG.htm
The Health Literacy Style Manual	Guidelines for organizing your document with examples of proper use.	http://www.idph.state.ia.us/heal thliteracy/common/pdf/tools/hls mchapter4.pdf

Credible Health Information Resource List

Agency	URL
Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality	http://www.ahrq.gov
Alzheimer's Association	http://www.alz.org/index.asp
American Academy of Pediatrics	http://www.aap.org
American Association of Family Physicians	http://www.aafp.org
American Cancer Society	http://www.cancer.org
American Diabetes Association	http://www.diabetes.org
American Heart Association	http://www.americanheart.org
American Lung Association	http://www.lungusa.org
American Medical Association	http://www.ama-assn.org
Arthritis Foundation	http://www.arthritis.org
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America	http://www.aafa.org
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America	http://www.aafa.org
California Department of Public Health	http://www.cdph.ca.gov
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	http://www.cdc.gov
Environmental Protection Agency	http://www.epa.gov
Food and Drug Administration	http://www.fda.gov
Health Finder	http://www.healthfinder.gov
Mayo Clinic	http://www.mayoclinic.com
Medline Plus	http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/healthtopics.html
National Cancer Institute	http://www.cancer.gov
National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute	http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov
National Institutes of Health	http://www.nih.gov
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services	http://www.hhs.gov
United States Preventive Services Task Force	http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/uspstfix.htm
US Department of Agriculture	http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usdahome
WebMD	http://www.webmd.com
World Health Organization	http://www.who.int/en